

# My first 20 years of HTTP

During the autumn 1996 I took my first swim in the ocean known as HTTP. Twenty years ago now.

I had previously worked with writing an [IRC bot in C](#), and IRC is a pretty [simple text based protocol](#) over TCP so I could use some experiences from that when I started to look into HTTP. That IRC bot was my first real application distributed to the world that was using TCP/IP. It was portable to most unixes and Amiga and it was open source.

1996 was the year the movie [Independence Day](#) premiered and the single hit song that plagued the world more than others that year was called [Macarena](#). AOL, Webcrawler and Netscape [were the most popular websites](#) on the Internet. There were [less than 300,000 web sites](#) on the Internet (compared to some 900 million today).

I decided I should spice up the bot and make it offer a currency exchange rate service so that people who were chatting could ask the bot what 200 SEK is when converted to USD or what 50 AUD might be in DEM. – *Right, there was no Euro currency yet back then!*

I simply had to fetch the currency rates at a regular interval and keep them in the same server that ran the bot.

I just needed a little tool to download the rates over HTTP. How hard can that be? I googled around (this was before Google existed so that was not the search engine I could use!) and found a tool named 'httpget' that made pretty much what I wanted. It truly was tiny – a few hundred lines of code.

I don't have an exact date saved or recorded for when this happened, only the general time frame. You know, we had no smart phones, no Google calendar and no digital cameras. I sported my first mobile phone back then, the sexy Nokia 1610 – viewed in the picture on the right here.

The HTTP/1.0 RFC had just recently came out – which was the first ever real spec published for HTTP. [RFC 1945](#) was published in May 1996, but I was blissfully unaware of the youth of the standard and I plunged into my little project. This was the first published HTTP spec and it says:

HTTP has been in use by the World-Wide Web global information initiative since 1990. This specification reflects common usage of the protocol referred too as "HTTP/1.0". This specification describes the features that seem to be consistently implemented in most HTTP/1.0 clients and servers.

Many years after that point in time, I have learned that already at this time when I first searched for a HTTP tool to use, [wget](#) already existed. I can't recall that I found that

in my searches, and if I had found it maybe history would've made a different turn for me. Or maybe I found it and discarded for a reason I can't remember now.

I wasn't the original author of `httpget`; Rafael Sagula was. But I started contributing fixes and changes and soon I was the maintainer of it. Unfortunately I've lost my emails and source code history from those earliest years so I cannot easily show my first steps. Even the oldest changelogs show that we very soon got help and contributions from users.

The earliest saved code archive I have from those days, is from after we had added support for Gopher and FTP and renamed the tool '`urlget`'. [urlget-3.5.zip](#) was released on January 20 1998 which thus was more than a year later my involvement in `httpget` started.

The original `httpget/urlget/curl` code was stored in CVS and it was licensed under the GPL. I did most of the early development on SunOS and Solaris machines as my first experiments with Linux didn't start until 97/98 something.

The [first web page I know we have saved](#) on archive.org is from December 1998 and by then the project had been renamed to curl already. Roughly two years after the start of the journey.

[RFC 2068](#) was the first HTTP/1.1 spec. It was released already in January 1997, so not that long after the 1.0 spec shipped. In our project however we stuck with doing HTTP 1.0 for a few years longer and it wasn't until [February 2001](#) we first started doing HTTP/1.1 requests. First shipped in [curl 7.7](#). By then the follow-up spec to HTTP/1.1, [RFC 2616](#), had already been published as well.

The [IETF](#) working group called [HTTPbis](#) was started in 2007 to once again refresh the HTTP/1.1 spec, but it took me a while until someone pointed out this to me and I

realized that I too could join in there and do my part. Up until this point, I had not really considered that little me could actually participate in the protocol doings and bring my views and ideas to the table. At this point, I learned about IETF and how it works.

I posted my first emails on that list in the spring 2008. The [75th IETF meeting](#) in the summer of 2009 was held in Stockholm, so for me still working on HTTP only as a spare time project it was very fortunate and good timing. I could meet a lot of my HTTP heroes and HTTPbis participants in real life for the first time.

I have participated in the HTTPbis group ever since then, trying to uphold the views and standpoints of a command line tool and HTTP library – which often is not the same as the web browsers representatives' way of looking at things. Since I was employed by Mozilla in 2014, I am of course now also in the "web browser camp" to some extent, but I remain a protocol puritan as curl remains my first "child".